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ON PAGE A-4

NEW YORK TIMES
8 MARCH 1983

U.S. Is Reported to Have Evidence That Barbie Visited in '69 and '70

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 7 — The Justice Department has found evidence to support a report that Klaus Barbie, a former Gestapo officer twice convicted as a Nazi war criminal, made several trips to the United States from his Bolivian refuge in 1969 and 1970, according to Federal officials and Congressional investigators.

However, the officials said, Attorney General William French Smith, after being advised of the findings, ruled out further Justice Department action last week on the grounds that no prosecution was likely to result and that historical inquiry was not the job of his agency. The findings were said to be that Government immigration and other records confirmed three or four trips by Mr. Barbie under the pseudonym Klaus Altmann to Miami and New Orleans in 1969 and 1970.

Representative Peter W. Rodino Jr., chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, wrote to Attorney General Smith last week to ask for an investigation of reports that Mr. Barbie was protected after the war by American intelligence agencies. Nine other members of Congress made a similar appeal to President Reagan.

Gestapo Chief in Lyons

The 69-year old Mr. Barbie, who was the Gestapo chief in Lyons, France, from 1942 to 1944, was twice convicted and sentenced to death in absentia by French courts on war crimes charges in the 1950's. He was expelled from Bolivia and returned to France on Feb. 6 to face trial in wartime mass murders.

[His poor health is expected to delay the trial, The Associated Press reported. It said Mr. Barbie was recovering in a Lyons hospital after a

hernia operation Sunday. He was also said to have a nervous complaint and kidney problems.]

The evidence of Mr. Barbie's visits to the United States was said to have been turned up after accounts last month by a Vancouver man that Mr. Barbie had boasted to him of such travels.

The Canadian, Robert G. Wilson, an ex-convict who said he became Mr. Barbie's confidant and biographer in Bolivia in the early 1970's, said in interviews that the Nazi fugitive asserted that he had visited New Orleans, San Francisco, Houston and Galveston, Tex. Mr. Wilson played tape recordings of what he said was Mr. Barbie's voice making some of those claims.

Entry Record for Klaus Altmann

Last month a spokesman for the Justice Department's Immigration and Naturalization Service said a quick check showed no evidence to support the assertions. But according to authoritative law enforcement officials, a later check of files showed an entry record at Miami for Klaus Altmann from Bolivia in 1969.

It was not until 1971 that Mr. Barbie's presence as Klaus Altmann in Bolivia was first publicly exposed by Beate Klarsfeld, an archivist of Nazi crimes.

A Federal official said the visits appeared to have related to Mr. Barbie's business as co-owner of Transmaritima Boliviana, the Government-sponsored shipping company.

French Government documents of 1963 recently reprinted in a Paris newspaper identified Mr. Barbie as purportedly working for the Central Intelligence Agency and the West German intelligence agency.